Glen Pettigrove, 'Characters and roles,' *Perspectives in Role Ethics: Virtues, Reasons, and Obligation*, Tim Dare and Christine Swanton, eds (Routledge, 2019).

ABSTRACT: For 21st century ethicists, one's character is thought to be a matter of one's internal dispositions and their external manifestation in action. This assumption, which is universally accepted among contemporary authors, would not have been shared by 18th century writers. Alongside one's internal dispositions, Butler, Hutcheson, Hume, and their peers also considered one's social roles to be part of one's character. This paper outlines some of the attractions of the earlier conception of character and responds to objections that must be faced by any account that includes social roles among character's ingredients.

What is character? According to most contemporary accounts, a person's character consists in a collection of psychological dispositions, known as character traits, which manifest themselves in how she thinks, feels, and acts.[1] She can change her fashion, her musical tastes, her favourite food, or her preferred pastime and remain, in all interesting senses, who she was. She may move from one school to another, one state to another, one country to another and still be the same person. She may go so far as to change her political party, her name, and her marital status, and yet remain fundamentally unchanged. But change her character and you change her identity. A person's character goes to the heart of who she is. Even within this core, some aspects are more central than others. A person can act like someone other than she is, i.e. her behaviour can be out of character, without that changing who she really is. Thus, within this core, the most internal aspects – namely, how she thinks and feels – are what really matter for the constitution of her character. Actions, on

[1] See, for example, Owen Flanagan, *Varieties of Moral Personality* (Harvard 1991) 263; Joel Kupperman, *Character* (Oxford 1991) 17; Rüdiger Bittner, 'Is It Reasonable to Regret Things One Did?' *Journal of Philosophy* 89 (1992): 262-273, at 269; Rosalind Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics* (Oxford 1999) 11-12; Rachana Kamtekar, 'Situationism and Virtue Ethics on the Content of Our Character,' *Ethics* 114 (2004): 458-491, at 460; Julia Annas, *Intelligent Virtue* (Oxford 2011) 8-10; Christian Miller, *Moral Character* (Oxford 2013) 4; Iskra Fileva, 'Character in Moral Psychology,' *Questions of Character*, Iskra Fileva, ed. (Oxford 2017) 105-120, at 110.

such an account, are important only to the extent that they manifest these inner qualities, revealing what one thinks and feels, disclosing who one is.

However, it has not always been thus. Earlier accounts of character did not share a number of assumptions upon which 21st century accounts depend. During the 17th and 18th centuries, character was thought of in quite different terms. Character, as Hume and his contemporaries conceived it, has a social, rather than an individual, ontology.[2] What others think of you partially determines your character. One place in which the difference between earlier and later perspectives is reflected is in the way a person's social roles are thought to relate to her character. At present, writers take a person's character and her roles to be independent. Earlier writers, by contrast, took social roles to be ingredients of character.

What should we make of this difference? I suggest it gives us reason to reconsider our account of character. This chapter will not settle the debate between these competing conceptual schemes. It aims, at a minimum, to keep contemporary theorists from dismissing the earlier view out of hand. More ambitiously, it identifies a number of respects in which the earlier account of character surpasses the contemporary alternative. I begin by discussing the nature of social roles. Section 2 looks at the work that our conception of character does for us and argues that it can do its job better if we include roles within our account of character. Section 3 lays out the most pressing objections to taking roles to be ingredients of character. In the final section I respond to those objections and show how we need a conception like the one with which Hume and company were working in order to fill a sizeable gap in contemporary accounts of the moral life.

[2] Pettigrove (2015a).

I. Roles

Social theorists employ the language of 'roles' to designate a number of different things. More often than not, when George Herbert Mead speaks of roles he is picking out individual points of view within the context of a relationship between two or more people.[3] So, for example, he speaks of a particular infant taking the role of her parent. At the outset, this merely involves mimicking some of the parent's characteristic actions, but as time goes on and the child develops a more robust awareness of other minds, it can also involve imagining how things seem from the other's vantage and thinking or feeling some of what they think and feel.[4]

However, sometimes Mead speaks of more generic roles: 'A child plays at being a mother, at being a teacher, at being a policeman; that is, it is taking different roles, as we say.'[5] Here 'role' no longer means a particular point of view, but picks out a social position that any number of people might take up. And this is the more usual meaning given to the term in social theory.[6] However, describing it in this way might give one the impression that the agent's point of view had been lost. This would be misleading, for when the child plays at being a teacher, she not only performs actions that are associated with the role, she also notices the kinds of things teachers notice and plays at caring about the sorts of things teachers care about. Thus, the social position she takes up is one that carries with it a stereotypical point of view, as well as distinct ways of acting and interacting.

Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann highlight how these two uses of 'role' might be related to one another. When two agents interact over a significant period of time, patterns

[3] George Herbert Mead, *Mind, Self, and Society* (Chicago [1934] 1967) 141n., 254, 364-376.
[4] Mead, 364ff.
[5] Mead, 150.
[6] Ralph Turner, 'Role: Sociological Aspects,' International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, vol. 13, David Sills, ed. (Macmillan and the Free Press, 1968) 552; Michael Hardimon, 'Role Obligations,' *Journal of Philosophy* 91.7 (1994): 333-363, at 335.

emerge.[7] One party repeats the same type of action from what appear to be the same kinds of motives and the other party begins to expect her to perform actions of that type and motivation under relevantly similar circumstances, adjusting his behaviour accordingly. As they become aware of these patterns, the parties begin to repeat them self-consciously. Each begins to play her own role, which is to say, each continues to act and feel in the patterned way, but now with an awareness that the other is expecting her so to act and feel. This makes their actions and motivations more predictable to the other and reduces the effort required to determine how to go on together.[8]

Berger and Luckmann discuss two factors, in particular, that facilitate the shift from roles of this local sort to more generic social roles. The first is the addition of third parties. The more people there are who observe the pattern and begin to form their expectations in light of it, the less it is up to the two actors who started it to change the pattern whenever they wish. The second factor is the process of socialization. When one comes into a social situation where there are already well-established patterns, they appear less dependent on the preferences and habits of the individuals in question and more a matter of 'how these things are done.'[9] This is especially true for children who are socialised into an environment in which these patterns are on display. As children, we are prone to take the patterns we have observed to be normative. But it is not exclusive to young children. Similar things happen for new employees who are socialised into the way a company does things. Berger and Luckmann suggest that both observation and socialisation 'thicken' or 'harden' social roles. They go from having a merely subjective reality for the original actors to having an 'objective' reality as they become fixed in a larger social or institutional context.[10]

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[7] Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality* (Doubleday 1966) 56; similarly, Erving Goffman *Encounters: Two Studies in the Sociology of Interaction* (Bobbs-Merrill 1961) 96.
[8] Berger and Luckmann, 56ff.
[9] Berger and Luckmann, 59.
[10] Berger and Luckmann, 59. What is meant by objectivity and whether Berger's and Luckmann's claims about objectivity are right is not a matter of concern for the argument of the present paper. All that is required is that

A third factor, not discussed by Berger and Luckmann, that facilitates the shift to generic social roles is the opportunity to notice similar patterns emerging between other individual actors. If the pattern we recognise is not just observed in the interactions of A and B, but also in those of C and D as well as E and F, then we are more likely to find it useful to speak of it in terms of a general role that many people might inhabit, rather than a point of view that is indexed to one or two particular individuals. And once language has been introduced or employed to label the pattern, the role becomes even more firmly established.

The kinds of roles that figured in 17th and 18th century treatments of character were roles of this more general sort. They included the role of the patriot, the soldier, the sailor, the gentleman, the physician, the philosopher, the magistrate, the elder brother, the wife, the chambermaid, the widow, the judge, and the jailor, to name just a few. Varied though this list might be, one could group these roles together under two primary headings. Generally, the roles that were thought relevant to one's character were defined in terms of one's status or function.[11] However, as gender-based roles illustrate, the divide between these two categories was not rigid. Gender pertained to both status and function. The elder brother's status was above sisters in the family – even older sisters – and he was expected to perform a number of traditional functions (including taking responsibility for the welfare of the rest of the family when the father died). Similarly, the role of a judge was defined around its function, but it also was associated with an elevated social standing (as compared to the role of the jailor or the physician). So the distinction between status-based and function-based roles should be thought of in terms of two circles in a Venn diagram that partially overlap. Although they overlap, there remain important differences between status- and function-based roles. The most important of these differences pertains to how the role might be lost.

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the contours of the roles in question and the expectations out of which they are built are not simply a matter for the role occupants to decide for themselves.

[11] In this respect, the roles of interest to them are broader than the roles discussed by Michael Hardimon, who focuses his attention on functionally defined roles (334).

One could be a gentleman landlord even if one performed none of the associated functions. One would be a bad landlord and a lacklustre gentleman, but a gentleman landlord all the same. However, someone who performed none of the functions associated with carpentry would not be a carpenter at all. Or if he started off as one, because at one point he worked with wood, he could cease to be a carpenter if he stopped building for long enough.

Some of the roles discussed by 17th and 18th century writers, like some of the roles mentioned by contemporary social theorists, are normatively thin. They are general groupings that describe typical behaviours and may aid an astute observer who wishes to predict what those who fit the description will do. Other roles are normatively thicker, picking out not only what role-occupants characteristically do, but also what they *should* do. The role of the 'college graduate,' would be an example of the former.[12] There are skills we may expect a college graduate to have acquired, but there are not moral ideals we expect college graduates to live up to simply in virtue of being graduates. Similarly, the role of 'felon'[13] is normatively thin. This is not to say that the **concept** FELON is normatively thin. On the contrary, it is a normatively thick concept; when we apply it to another person we are thereby evaluating her. Nevertheless, the **role** with which it is associated is normatively thin. The role of felon does not involve a normative script that includes guidelines for how the role occupant ought to behave, such that the role occupant need worry about living up to the standards intrinsic to the role. It would be odd for someone to think, 'I'm a felon, but I haven't committed a crime in months. I need to lift my game!' By contrast, normatively thick roles – like spouse, high court judge, and spiritual leader – do involve such a script, and if one fails to live up to the role's standards then one is susceptible to shame and subject to

[12] Peter Callero offers it as an example of a role in 'From Role-Playing to Role-Using: Understanding Role as Resource,' *Social Psychology Quarterly* 57 (1994) 237.
[13] Also discussed by Callero, 237.

censure.[14] There are a number of normative (as opposed to merely predictive) expectations that define the latter. Both thick and thin roles can each be used in utterances like, 'Of course you should [**X**]. You're her [**Y**]. That's what your *supposed* to do' (where X picks out an action and Y a role). But the thicker the role, the more (and the more binding) X's there will be.[15]

Closely related to the normative thickness of a role are the enablements and constraints attached to it. Some social theorists define social ontology in terms of enablements and constraints, such that X only has a social existence as a certain kind of thing to the extent that being an X enables one to perform certain actions or fulfill certain functions and constrains one from doing others.[16] Whether or not that is the best way to characterise social ontology, attending to what they enable one to do or constrain one from doing is an important part of understanding social roles. There are certain actions, such as sentencing a criminal to life in prison, that can only be performed by a judge. Being a judge enables one to pass a legally binding sentence. Occupying the role (of judge) is the condition for the possibility of performing the action (of sentencing). In other cases, occupying the role is not required to perform the action; it is just required if one is to have permission to perform the action. Anyone with resources, land, a basic knowledge of physics, and rudimentary woodworking, plumbing, and wiring skills could build a house. If they have more than rudimentary skills, they might even build it well. However, in many social contexts, if they are not recognised as a carpenter (i.e., as occupying not just the functional role but also the social role of the carpenter), then they will not have permission to build a house. As a result,

[14] We do not always have a distinct word to designate a thick role. For example, the term 'father' can be used to pick out both a thick and a thin role. The term can refer to a man responsible for looking after a child, which would be a thick role. Or it can refer to a merely descriptive biological role, which would also include the anonymous sperm donor.
[15] Which roles there are and which expectations are associated with each role will be shaped by one's background culture.
[16] See, for example, Ásta, *Categories We Live By: The Construction of Sex, Gender, Race, & Other Social Categories* (Oxford 2018) 2.

they may be obliged to take down the house they have built or pay a fine for having built it without the required permissions.

Similarly with constraints, occupying a role may constrain one from performing certain actions. If we ignore social roles for a moment, most cultures are fairly permissive about the giving and receiving of gifts. Anyone can give almost anything of which they are the sole owner to anyone else. However, in many social contexts if one is a candidate for political office, one's role restricts the kinds of gifts one may receive and the range of sources from whom one may receive them. Likewise, if one is a plaintiff in a criminal case, one's social role constrains one's gift giving activities; one may not give a gift to the judge, the district attorney, or members of the jury.

The norms that enable or constrain occupants of social roles will be an important part of the script of normatively thick roles. For example, it is only because her role enables her to marry couples that a minister of the church has to ask whether she should marry *this* couple. And it is because people in her civic environment or religious denomination are only permitted to have one spouse at a time that her role constrains her from marrying a couple if she knows that one of them is currently married to someone else. However, role related enablements and constraints need not account for every feature of the script. A minister of the church might also be expected to pray at public events, not because she is the only one who *can* pray in public (since these words would still count as a prayer if spoken by someone other than a minister of the church) or who *may* pray in public (since in her social and religious context laypeople are also permitted to pray at public events), but because this is the kind of thing ministers can be relied upon to do and it is traditional for them to do it.

II. Character and Role

Why might one think there is a connection between a person's character and the roles she occupies? One reason is etymological. The French word 'rôle', from which the English word was borrowed, was derived from the word 'roule', which referred to 'the roll of paper on which [an] actor's part was written.'[17] At the time the word passed into English, 'role' meant the 'character represented by an actor.' That origin continues to influence contemporary usage, as reflected in the *Oxford English Dictionary*'s definition of the term 'role': 'a person's share, lot, or duty in life and society; the character, place, or status assigned to or assumed by a person.'[18] However, etymology is not always a reliable guide to conceptual terrain. Furthermore, a social role is not an actor's roule, and personal character differs from a dramatic character. So the etymological connection does not settle the question we are asking.

A different reason one might think a person's character is connected to – and, indeed, partly made up of – her social roles emerges if we consider the purposes for which we use the concept CHARACTER. When a prospective employer asks for a character reference, she does so because she would like to be able to predict the kind of employee a job candidate will be. In addition to predicting future actions, we also appeal to character to explain prior behaviour: 'Pat's angry rant at the staff meeting was entirely in character.' On such occasions we may also appeal to character traits to evaluate the person of whom we speak, adding 'She's awfully short tempered' or 'He's such a narcissist!' And we routinely refer to character to tell others about someone we know but they do not: 'He's remarkably kind' or 'She's the bravest person I know.' These examples highlight four purposes for which we use the concept of a person's character: 1) predicting future action, 2) explaining past action, 3)

[17] https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/role (accessed 25 January 2019).
[18] 'Role,' *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, 3rd ed. (2010).

evaluating one another, and 4) saying who someone is. This section will show how a person's roles contribute to each of these functions.

When it comes to predicting future actions, knowing a person's role increases the likelihood that one's predictions will be accurate.[19] There are both shallow and deep reasons for this. Since roles are, to a large extent, defined in terms of characteristic actions, it is not surprising that knowing someone's role will increase one's ability to predict what they will do. Furthermore, coming as they do with expectations and responsibilities, there are a range of social factors that contribute to the likelihood that occupants of normatively thick roles will act in ways characteristic of the role. This is not to say that every role-occupant will fill the role in exactly the same way or with the same reliability as every other, any more than we expect every actress to fill a dramatic role in exactly the same way as every other. As Michael Hardimon observes, 'taking on a social role is, at least ideally, largely a matter of finding an interpretation that fits one's own temperament …'.[20] Nevertheless, the chances that a role-occupant will act in accordance with expectations is higher than average, and with some roles those chances are considerable.

There are also deeper reasons for thinking roles are predictive. As Berger and Luckmann observe, 'To learn a role it is not enough to acquire the routines immediately necessary for its "outward" performance. One must also be initiated into the various cognitive and affective layers of the body of knowledge that is directly and indirectly appropriate to this role.'[21] As we are socialised into the role we come to recognise certain conditions as reasons to perform one action rather than another.[22] We learn to care about certain factors and give them greater weight in our deliberations. This is truer of some roles

[19] See Ron Mallon, 'Social Construction, Social Roles, and Stability,' *Socializing Metaphysics*, Frederick Schmitt, ed. (Rowman and Littlefield 2003) 327-353.
[20] Hardimon, 355.
[21] Berger and Luckmann, 77.
[22] Hardimon, 358.

than it is of others. With some roles it is crucial that one embrace the goods around which the roles were built; whereas with others this is less important. But with most roles, learning to occupy the role changes the shape of one's dispositions. And the longer one occupies the role, the more permanent the change is likely to be.

The discussion of how roles can aid us in predicting their occupants' actions puts us in a position to see why it can also help us explain what they have already done. It can give us clues to their motivational structure. 'Of course he loves to argue a point, he's a lawyer.' 'She's a software engineer. Is it any surprise she was excited to pre-order a computer with Intel's long-awaited new processor?' Knowing someone's role can help us identify some of the reasons she found salient when deciding what to do. It may also pick out some of the social pressures that help maintain role-appropriate behaviour. Part of what explains the frequency with which doctors offer assistance when they encounter a medical emergency at the theatre or in a restaurant is their knowledge of what to do in such circumstances, part may be their general concern for human welfare, but part is also that people expect them to help, are prepared to submit to their direction, and will think poorly of them if they do not lend a hand. When we combine knowledge of a person's roles with information about her temperament and abilities, we are equipped with a much more powerful tool for explaining her actions than we would have if we looked at temperament and abilities alone.

The connection between roles and evaluation is also clear. Some obligations apply to more or less everyone, regardless of role. In a marginally just society, injunctions against killing, coveting, and stealing apply irrespective of one's place in society.[23] However, in many cases, we cannot say whether a person acted well or badly until we know something about the roles she occupies. Superficially, we need to know what she was meant to do if we

[23] Other traditional norms, such as directives not to commit adultery or obligations to honour father and mother, may likewise apply across the board, although they have an appeal to social roles built into them.

are to evaluate what she has been doing. Imagine we meet a man – let's call him Tom – who lives on several acres outside of town. A neglected vegetable patch takes up one corner of his property. An untidy orchard fills several more acres and scattered about the base of each tree sit the remnants of last season's harvest. A dozen sheep roam another part of the property with coats that should have been shorn a few weeks ago in order to fetch the best price. Knowing this information does not yet put us in a position to judge that something is amiss. Tom may be a law professor who grew up on a farm and has purchased a bit of property out in the country for nostalgic reasons. The garden may be left over from a prior owner and the sheep may be there simply to keep the property from getting too overgrown. As long as he is not despoiling the land or abusing the animals, the fact that he does not cultivate them is not a mark against him. It might even be a mark in his favour, if it shows he is able to enjoy communing with Mother Nature without feeling as though he must control her. If, on the other hand, we learn Tom is a farmer or farm manager, we will draw a rather different conclusion. As Philippa Foot points out, 'a farmer is a good farmer only if he looks after his soil, his animals or his crops.'[24] We cannot evaluate Tom's behaviour, then, until we know his role.

The connection between role and evaluation runs even deeper, precisely because of how we expect roles to shape what we care about and how we reason. When assessing someone's benevolence, we need to know something about the relations in which she stands to those around her. If the person she is helping is a stranger, we may judge her to be generous. If, on the other hand, she is helping her child, we may think her stingy. The same applies to evaluating whether or not someone is caring: 'the target of a caring doctor in assessing a patient is not to make her feel good but to give an accurate diagnosis, but in a respectful way. The target of a caring friend by contrast is to make her feel good in an

[24] Philippa Foot, 'Rationality and Virtue,' *Norms, Values, and Society*, H. Pauer-Studer, ed. (Kluwer 1994) 208.

affectionate way.'[25] This is not just a point about what we need to know in order to evaluate reliably. A person's roles are part of what determines which traits of character she has. The very same combination of actions and motivations can be either virtuous or vicious depending on the person's role. Thus, if we are to evaluate a person accurately, we must know something about the roles she occupies.[26]

The connection between social roles and the fourth function of character ascriptions is even clearer than the first three. Asked who someone is, we naturally refer to their roles. They are a mother or a father, a daughter or a son, a sister or a brother, an aunt or an uncle, a niece or a nephew. They are teacher or student, actor or director, manager or governor, lawyer or client, investor or broker, candidate or voter. The same is true when we meet someone new and they ask us who we are. The descriptions for which we reach routinely identify the roles we occupy. These are not peripheral features of the answers we give. Indeed if, on some occasion, we omit references to someone's role, we may find ourselves chided for so doing: 'Why didn't you tell me she was married? I wouldn't have flirted with her.' 'If I had known he was your boss, I would not have told him about the hydroponics bay we built in the basement of our college dorm.' 'When he held forth about what the newly elected president would need to do during her first three months in office, I impatiently thought he was just a windbag who liked to hear himself talk. If you had told me he was her deputy chief-of-staff, I would have seen the conversation in a completely different light.'

We mention social roles when introducing someone in part because, as we have seen, knowledge of someone's roles carries a lot of further information with it. Knowing someone's roles offers quicker access to someone's identity than do many other qualities.

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[25] Christine Swanton, 'A Virtue Ethical Theory of Role Ethics,' *Journal of Value Inquiry* 50 (2016) 694.
[26] Tim Dare uses a case in which a man asks a woman a series of direct, detailed, and uncomfortable questions about her sex life to make a similar point: 'Conduct that would show him to be a creep qua date, shows him to be thorough qua researcher, or diligent qua gynaecologist, or professional qua lawyer' (*Counsel of Rogues?* [Ashgate 2009] 32).

Certain qualities may have few opportunities to be displayed. One might need to know someone for a long time before having an opportunity to observe their generosity or their equanimity. So social roles are often a more reliable way of identifying who someone is and what they are like than are other kinds of information.

Providing quick access to information about a person is not the only reason we mention the social roles they occupy when describing who they are. It is also because many of our social roles are woven into how we conceive of ourselves. It is often so deeply woven into our sense of self that when we cease to occupy a key role – as a result of retirement, divorce, or termination of employment – it is common for us to face a crisis of identity. Because of their significance for our identity, we police ourselves to ensure our actions are consistent with our roles. As Erving Goffman observes,

> [I]n performing a role the individual must see to it that the impressions of him that are conveyed in the situation are compatible with role-appropriate personal qualities effectively imputed to him: a judge is supposed to be deliberate and sober; a pilot, in a cockpit, to be cool; a bookkeeper to be accurate and neat in doing his work. These personal qualities, effectively imputed and effectively claimed, combine with a position's title, where there is one, to provide a basis of *self-image* for the incumbent and a basis for the image that his role others will have with him.[27]

Thus, if we know that a person not only occupies a particular role but also identifies with it, taking it to be an important part of who she is, then our ability to predict and explain her actions is additionally improved.

If character is defined, at least in part, in terms of its ability to fulfil these four functions, then we have reason to think of roles as ingredients of character. An account of character that includes someone's roles better equips us to predict what they will do, explain what they have already done, say who they are, and evaluate how they think, feel, and act.

[27] Goffman, *Encounters*, 87.

III. Objections

While the preceding section shows there is something to be said for a conception of character that includes a person's social roles, there are a number of reasons one might not yet be ready to re-draw the conceptual map. This section will consider five such reasons. First, a person's social roles can change more quickly than her character, which suggests the two concepts do not stand or fall together. Second, one's character can change even though one's social role has remained fixed, again suggesting one's social roles are not ingredients of one's character. Third, occupying a social role is not necessary for having a character. Fourth, including social roles as part of one's character can lead to problematic forms of stereotyping. Finally, one might think making social roles constituents of character depends upon a category mistake. Let us consider each in turn.

The first objection to a conception of character that includes social roles is that roles can change quickly and easily, but character traits do not. Rosalind Hursthouse observes,

> Once acquired, [character traits] are strongly entrenched, precisely because they involve so much more than mere tendencies to act in certain ways. A change in such character traits is a profound change, one that goes ... 'all the way down'. Such a change can happen slowly, but on the rare occasions when it happens suddenly, the change calls for special explanations – religious conversion, an experience that changes the person's whole outlook on life, brain damage, drugs. It is certainly not a change that one can just decide to bring about oneself overnight....[28]

Similarly, Linda Zagzebski writes, '[T]he concept of a virtue and of moral character will not permit cases of the instantaneous development of a virtue or of an instantaneous change in character.'[29] Roles, by contrast, can change from one minute to the next. At 3:02 one was Hal, friend of highwaymen, but at 3:03 one becomes Henry V, King of England and defender of justice.

[28] Hursthouse, 12. See also Anthony Quinton, 'Character and Culture,' *The New Republic* 189.16 (1983): 26-30.
[29] Linda Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind* (Cambridge 1996) 124.

The second objection is that one's character might change even though one's role has not. As a result of thirteen years of concerted effort one may have succeeded in becoming a less selfish spouse. Here there is a change in character even though there has been no change in role. Indeed, in some cases – including perhaps this one – such a change might only be possible because one has *not* changed one's role. At the very least, if one does not continue to be someone's spouse, one cannot hope to become a less selfish spouse.

Third, a social role is not necessary for having a character. Consider the protagonist of Robert Zemeckis's movie, *Cast Away*. Chuck Noland (played by Tom Hanks) is a logistics specialist who is marooned on a small, uninhabited island after his plane crashes in the Pacific Ocean. While on the island he occupies no social role, but that does not mean he loses his character as a result of falling out of social space. He continues to be hard-working, persistent, resourceful, and responsible. If having a social role is not necessary for having character, why think it is part of a person's character at all? Or if it is part, it would seem a rather unimportant one.

Fourth, including social roles in one's account of character can be misleading. Worries about occasions where social roles and other constituents of character come apart were among the factors that contributed to the decline of the 18th century conception of character.[30] As social mobility became more common, people found it less helpful to predict others' behavior based on their social role. And as social mobility took on more ideological importance, people found it less appealing to be stereotyped on the basis of their social role.

The fifth, and most challenging, objection is that a conception of character that includes one's role as an ingredient involves a category mistake. The objector can agree that knowing

[30] Axel Honneth suggests that another contributing factor was the way in which developments in philosophy took the metaphysical legs out from under convention: 'Stripped of its transcendental basis, it could no longer be viewed as an objective system of reference in which presumptions regarding the conduct befitting the various social status groups also provided unambiguous information about the various respective degrees of social honor' (*Disrespect* [Polity 2007] 260).

someone's social roles can improve our ability to predict or explain someone's actions. But that is because occupying a role can have a causal influence both on one's actions and on the character one develops. If James takes a job as a cook under a manager who insists that the kitchen be kept immaculate, one would expect over time for that to have an influence on how he keeps his kitchen at home. The expectation is not based on the thought that his role becomes part of his character, but rather on the thought that his role causes a change in character.[31]

IV. Responses

In order to address the objections raised above, it is important to say a bit more about the view of character that was common among 18th century writers. They thought of a person's character as made up of six kinds of ingredients, only one of which is the person's social role. The other ingredients were temperament, aptitudes, representative behaviours, intimate relations, and reputation. The first of these ingredients, '*temperament*', refers to the mental and physical dispositions that contribute to an agent's behaviours. While temperament is the most important of character's ingredients, two individuals with similar temperaments might have quite different characters if they possess different *aptitudes*. If the projects they care about come easily to one of them but are difficult for the other, then we would expect their characters to differ. Including *representative behaviours* reflects the thought that a person's character is not only a matter of what she cares about but also of what she does. It is a familiar enough thought. To count as generous, a person must care strongly enough about the welfare of others to take steps to help them when she sees they are in need and has the capacity to assist. Furthermore, someone who dashes across the street to pull a child out of the path of oncoming traffic will be a different person, consequently, than a

[31] I am grateful to Graham Oddie for pressing this objection.

similarly disposed bystander who watched the event unfold from the third-story window of a nearby building. *Intimate relations* are closely linked to social roles, insofar as they pick out the occupants of roles closely connected to the agent's own. The idea is that understanding who a person is and what he is like requires knowing not only that he is a husband, but who he is married to, as well. It also assumes that character is a team effort, something we make together with others. The final ingredient is *reputation*: What others think of you partially determines who you are. We see this most vividly in traits like being domineering. One cannot be domineering unless at least some others see one as in-charge and respond submissively. Without a public who perceives one in the relevant way, one might be assertive, even overbearing, but one could not be domineering.

The first three ingredients would be at home in most contemporary accounts of character. Some people might wonder about whether to include non-moral aptitudes or whether to think of behaviours as ingredients or merely symptoms of character. But the line between moral and non-moral aptitudes is tricky to draw and everyone will agree that behaviours are relevant to character; so even if they would describe the relations in a slightly different way, they are not likely to balk at temperaments, aptitudes, and behaviours being part of the account. The other three ingredients, by contrast, will strike most 21st century authors as puzzling. I will not say any more about intimate relations or reputation in this paper, but let us see what can be done to address the concerns about roles.

Recognising that one's roles are only part of one's character helps to address the first objection. Character's other constituents can explain Hursthouse's and Zagzebski's insight that character changes generally happen slowly. Since those other constituents are not all transformed when one changes roles, one would expect that most role changes would not bring abrupt character changes. And this is precisely what we find. Typically, it takes a person time to settle into a new role and figure out how they will inhabit it.

Even after we settle into a role, many role changes will not involve character changes. The shift from conscientious lawyer to conscientious judge, for example, need not involve a character change. This might be because traits like conscientiousness and respect for law were responsible for how the lawyer inhabited her role and they might carry on determining how she inhabits the role of judge. Alternatively, there may be higher-order roles (such as public servant or law enforcement officer) that do the decisive normative work in determining how she fills out her lower-order role (of prosecutor or judge). In such cases, although the lawyer has changed her lower-order role, she has not changed her higher-order role (of law enforcement officer), and since the higher-order role did most of the normative work, the lower-order role-change may not involve a character-change.

However, there is still a range of familiar cases in which a change in role does introduce a change in character. Think of the academic who is a decidedly different person as the Head of College or Dean of the Faculty than she was as an associate professor. Sometimes such changes are abrupt. On those occasions where a change in role does bring about a sudden change in character, the fact that the person in question has taken on a new role can be part of the 'special explanation' that sudden character changes require. Take, for example, the Zimbardo prison experiments, in which seemingly ordinary university students suddenly began abusing their classmates.[32] Cases like this one have been marched out as objections to character-based approaches to ethics on the grounds that those approaches cannot account for the seemingly out-of-character behaviour of the experimental subjects.[33] However, if social roles are constituents of character then the students' behaviour in the Zimbardo experiment becomes much less puzzling. Zimbardo's subjects behaved differently in the experiment than they did in other relationships because they were given new roles.

[32] Philip Zimbardo, 'On the Ethics of Intervention in Human Psychological Research,' *Cognition* 2.2 (1973): 243-256.
[33] John Doris, *Lack of Character* (Cambridge 2002); Mark Alfano, *Character as Moral Fiction* (Cambridge 2013).

They were assigned the roles of guard or prisoner. These are roles whose scripts had been portrayed to them in movies, on television, and in books. It is likely that many of them would have rehearsed roles like these in childhood games. What they displayed in the experiment was their ability to take on a new role and act the part. While they occupied those roles, the guards' abusive behaviour was not out-of-character. It represented the character they had been given.

Responding to the first objection highlights a way of responding to the second, as well. Since one's role is only one ingredient of character, there is room for other ingredients to change – and thus for one's character to change – even when one's role remains fixed. Furthermore, one can change the way in which one enacts one's role. A previously autocratic manager can work to adopt a more collaborative style. Or, rather than surrounding herself with friends who spend much of their time recounting in detail the ways in which their partners disappoint them, a spouse can choose to spend time with friends who are more inclined to talk about what they appreciate about their partners and about how they can contribute to making their relationships stronger or helping their partners feel more loved. By changing some of their intimate relations along with characteristic thoughts and actions they can alter the way they inhabit their role. The second objection, then, poses no real difficulty for an account of character that includes social roles among its ingredients.

The third objection begins with the claim that having a role is not necessary for having a character and then proceeds to suggest that if it is not necessary, it is not an important part of character. One might respond to this concern by challenging the claim that having a role is not necessary in order to having a character. It is much harder than one might think to come up with an example of someone who has a character but no role. If we return to the example of *Cast Away*, part of what is striking is that, even in the midst of his struggle to survive, Noland holds on to a parcel he salvages from the wreckage. He does so because

he still conceives of himself as being in the parcel delivery business. Even when his current circumstances are such that other people are not interacting with him in a role-defined capacity or relying on him to discharge role-based obligations, his role remains a part of who he understands himself to be.[34] Of course, Noland's story is a fiction. But it reflects an important truth. While we wear some of our roles quite lightly, others become central to our identity. Furthermore, being role occupants – being A's child, B's sibling, C's student, D's friend, E's neighbour, etc. – was central to our development into moral agents. Alasdair MacIntyre observes, 'It is in general only within a community that individuals become capable of morality, are sustained in their morality and are constituted as moral agents by the way in which other people regard them and what is owed to and by them as well as by the way in which they regard themselves.'[35] If MacIntyre is right, then roles play a part in our constitution as moral agents. The roles we occupy are a component of how others regard us and how they understand what we owe to each other.

However, even if occupying some role or other is necessary for developing into a moral agent, and even if roles we occupied in the past remain important for our identity in the present, it is still conceivable that someone might have a character in spite of the fact that she does not currently occupy any social roles and no social roles form a part of her own sense of who she is. Perhaps she is a recluse who grows or makes everything she uses and who lives completely off the grid.[36] Such an example shows that having a role is not essential to having a character. But it does not follow that roles are an unimportant part of character. X can be an important part of Y_1 even if X is not necessary for every Y. For example, chocolate can

[34] Such role persistence is even more obvious in Noland's literary forebear, Robinson Crusoe. It is precisely because of Crusoe's continuing role identity that, when human society is restored to him in the form of Friday, he does not engage with Friday as an equal, but rather treats him as a servant.
[35] Alasdair MacIntyre, 'Is Patriotism a Virtue?' *The Lindley Lecture* (Kansas 1984) 10.
[36] Note how far we must go from our familiar, everyday lives to come up with an example that might do the trick. Even here, we must take care not to make her a religious hermit, since that would be to introduce a familiar, well-defined social role.

be an important part of a particular cheesecake even if chocolate is not a necessary part of every cheesecake. Similarly, being a priest can be an important part of Father Brown's character – perhaps an essential part – even if none of the roles our imagined recluse has occupied have been an important part of her character.

Regarding the fourth objection, I am happy to agree that knowing about someone's social roles could give us a misleading sense of their character. Many widely accepted assumptions about which character traits are connected to which social roles are wrongheaded and ought to be changed. Think, for example, about the role-based assumptions on which Thomas Hardy cast a critical eye in *Jude the Obscure* – about manual labourers, Oxbridge students, and unwed parents, among others. As a result of such assumptions, learning that someone occupies one of those roles will lead a number of people to make mistaken judgments about their character. However, learning facts about someone's temperament or representative behaviours can also be misleading. Learning that someone is disposed to share his possessions might lead one to believe he is compassionate. Learning that someone is intelligent might lead one to think she is wise. Learning that someone lacked temperance in the past might lead one to believe he is still intemperate. With each of these assumptions, there will be numerous cases in which the inference is blocked because the typical link between the first and second quality does not exist. However, everyone – past and present – thinks temperament (i.e., physical and mental dispositions) and representative behaviours should be considered part of character, regardless of the fact that knowing about some temperamental traits or representative behaviours might lead a number of people to make mistaken judgments about their character. Thus, the fact that learning something about

X could lead people to make mistaken judgments about someone's character is not a sufficient reason for excluding X from one's account of character.

Nevertheless, one might think there is something particularly insidious about the way roles might mislead, either because they are more misleading or mislead in worse ways. If the way we incorporated them involved something as crude as thinking 'All doctors are decent' or 'All car salesmen are dodgy' then the worry would be well-grounded. But nothing about the account we are exploring requires anything so crude. Between the 18th century and the present, social roles have become decidedly more fluid. It is easier for people to move between roles. And there is greater awareness of how class-based roles were used historically to keep the privileged in power. All of that means that there is already room in contemporary understandings of social roles for criticizing totalizing views that would treat all role occupants as identical or take a person's social role to define all of her character. As a result, we may be less able to predict others' behaviour based on their role or station than earlier generations. However, as noted above, we still successfully appeal to roles when accounting for others' behaviours and preferences, as evidenced by statements like, 'It's no surprise she did that. She's a politician. What did you expect?' This suggests that an appeal to social roles can still be predictive, explanatory, evaluative, and identificatory, even if it is less useful in some respects than once it was.

The final objection, which claims that the 18th century conception of character is confused, is the most challenging. This is because the objection is rooted in an alternative approach to refining and making more precise the idea of who someone is and what they are like. Informed both by the growing individualism of the 19th and 20th centuries and by developments in psychology, this alternative conceives of character as composed of mental states or processes like hopes, fears, desires, aversions, commitments, beliefs, abilities, tendencies, and dispositions. Character, so conceived, picks out the real me, in contrast to

features of the environment around me that might also influence my behaviour. This collection of mental states and processes is subject to causal influences from things like the opportunities with which I am presented, the people with whom I associate, others' expectations of me, and the roles I occupy.

The first thing to note in response to the objection is that an account of character that includes one's social roles can do everything the alternative does. There is room within the account for a social role to interact causally with a person's psychology. One's role can causally influence each of character's other parts, including one's temperament, aptitudes, representative behaviours, reputation, and intimate relations (and vice versa). Thus, the kind of causal interaction the objector has in mind can already be represented within the 18th century framework. An account of character that includes someone's social roles does not even need to justify introducing a new relation – namely, causation – between the parts that make up one's character, since that relation is a feature of 21st century accounts, as well. Our desires, for example, are thought to have a causal influence on our commitments, behaviours, abilities, and beliefs.

One advantage of including social roles within one's account of character is that it better accommodates common ways of thinking about who we are and what we are like. As far as my students are concerned, the role of teacher is not something that causally influences who I am. From their vantage, being a teacher is part – often the most salient part – of who I am. Similarly, the role of parent is not seen by my children, my spouse, or my neighbours as exercising a causal influence on me. Rather, it is a feature that defines who I am and what I am like and enables them to predict or explain my actions in a wide range of cases.

At this point one might worry I have changed the subject. My students see being a teacher as part of my *personal character*, someone might contend, but the objector was talking about *moral character*. To assess this proposal, we need to know what is meant by

'moral character'. Fully settling that question would require spelling out the meaning of 'moral', but that is a matter for another day.[37] Let us assume we know how to use it in this context. *'Moral' or 'ethical' character is that aspect of one's personal identity that is ethically evaluable.* We can contrast this with features of personal character like musical taste or introversion that do not influence whether we judge someone to be a good or bad, moral or immoral, person.

However, if this is the way moral character is identified, then an account of character that includes a person's social roles has an advantage over one that does not. As noted above, a person's social roles are part of what is evaluated when we are assessing her moral qualities. It is not enough to know the physical movements she executed, the words she said, the emotions she felt, or the dispositions she has; we must also know whether she is a neighbour, friend, parent, teacher, manager, judge, politician, etc. We need to know a person's social roles because, depending on what they are, they can change the meaning of her movements, words, emotions, and dispositions. Not only are a person's social roles part of what we need to know in order to assess many of her actions accurately, they are also part of what we evaluate about her. Evaluating her as a person often involves evaluating her as a parent, or a teacher, or an author, or a member of Parliament, or all of the above. Occasionally, it may even be fitting to evaluate her even if all one knows about her is that she occupies a certain role. For example, if she is the Director of Eugenics for the Third Reich, we can make certain ethical judgments of her even if we are not well acquainted with her emotions, dispositions, or other mental processes.

Let us suppose that, after thinking about it for a while, an advocate of the more restrictive view of moral character is persuaded by the preceding discussion that one must

[37] For two expressions of concern regarding the meaning of 'moral' and its relevance to 'character', see G.E.M. Anscombe, 'Modern Moral Philosophy,' *Philosophy* 33 (1958): 1-19; and David Wolsdorf, 'Morality and Aristotelian Character Excellence,' in Fileva (2017) 19-32.

attend to people's social roles when we evaluate them ethically. Even so, she might think it is only the internal, psychological aspects of social roles that are relevant to the evaluation of character.[38] What matters is whether she thinks of herself as a lawyer, cares about the goods central to the role, and has internalised the norms and expectations that accompany being an occupant of this role. However, as important as these are, mental states are not sufficient for evaluation and identification. We can see the importance of the role itself (understood as the position in social space) if we consider someone who has the mental dispositions that accompany being a drill sergeant, for example, but who occupies not that role but rather the role of family therapist. It matters not only that one has certain mental states and processes but also that one, in fact, occupies the role with which they are associated.

One final consideration in favour of including social roles in our conception of ethical character is that doing so makes existing practices of ascribing character traits to others better justified. We have better evidence for character ascriptions that include social roles than we do for those that focus only on temperament. That is because most – some would say all – of our knowledge of others is drawn from our experiences of interacting with them as occupants of social roles. We are seldom in a position to make reliable counter-factual predictions of how a person would think, feel, and act if she found herself removed from all of her existing social roles and relationships. Even anticipating the effect of altering one of her social roles can be difficult. (For example, everyone at the company will tell you that Sheila is confident and assertive. But they have only seen her when she occupied a position of authority. It is hard to say whether she would still be confident and assertive were she in a subordinate role.) As a result, if our judgments about ethical character are meant to focus only on mental attributes, then they will routinely be unjustified. Even with people we have known for years, such counter-factual judgments would often be unreliable. On the other hand, if a person's

[38] I am grateful to Michael Brady for pursuing this line of thinking.

social roles are included as part of the thing we are judging, then our evidence base improves considerably and the reliability of our judgments goes up.

V. Conclusion

Contemporary accounts identify a person's character with a set of psychological dispositions that manifest themselves in her actions. I have been arguing for a more expansive account that also includes a person's social roles. There are several reasons to prefer a role-inclusive account. Psychology under-determines character. CHARACTER is better equipped to perform its defining functions – of saying who someone is, evaluating what they are like, and explaining and predicting what they will do – if social roles are included in our conception. A role-inclusive account also enables us to make sense of sudden role-related changes of character that are harder for psychologically focused views to explain. And it underscores the significant difference social roles make to familiar evaluative practices.

Of course, numerous questions still remain unanswered, such as whether to include all social roles or only a subset within our account. Among the roles that are included, should some be given greater weight than others? If so, how should we assign these weightings? But before we can begin to ask those questions, we must first recognise the importance of roles for everyday ascriptions of character.[39]

[39] Earlier drafts of this chapter were presented to audiences at Cardiff University, Queen's University Belfast, and the universities of Auckland, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Leeds, Sheffield, and Stirling. I benefitted greatly from the feedback I received on each of those occasions.